

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFF

Mowing Las Vegas

**FLORIDA'S BIG DREAMERS
MAX WALKER REMEMBERS
LESSONS FROM BEND, OREGON
MOWING MANIA IN DAYTONA BEACH**

VOL. 

WALKER TALK

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lights poses
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QUALITY

Shortly after Walker Talk Volume 8 was printed, we found 15 printing defects: typos, misspellings, printing errors. What was really upsetting and embarrassing to me was that I had personally proofread the entire magazine before printing. After contacting the Walker Talk publisher, we quickly put a quality control plan in place for future issues.

The subject of quality would fill an ocean with books, seminars and specialists, but here are three simple observations:



- Quality is "a journey and not a destination." It is a never-ending effort to deliver the best possible quality to our customers. It is not some elusive point that is finally reached called perfect or zero defect. From the perspective of quality as a journey, a

company is never satisfied with the status quo and never stops working for quality.

- Quality is a group effort built on individual responsibility. Quality-minded leadership may well set the direction, but it will be a group that delivers quality when the product is produced by the group (very few products or services are delivered as a solo act).

- Quality is carried out by individuals who say "I care" about giving full value to the customer. The best plan or organization won't deliver quality without people who care. In a lot of ways caring is more an issue of character than incentive.

Walker Manufacturing is quality minded in our leadership, but it is the quality coming from our employees, suppliers, distributors, dealers and end-customers that makes us look good.

Bob Walker

Bob Walker
President



Mowing Las Vegas

*City of lights poses unique
challenge for landscape contractor*

M

ike Lake, owner of Ocean Front Landscaping, takes a deep breath. He looks around at the city in which he lives and works and can barely believe his eyes.

"I like to say our crews mow Las Vegas," tells Ocean Front Landscaping owner Mike Lake. Thirteen Walker mowers give his crews the ability and agility to mow the tight spaces that comprise so many of his properties.

WALKER TALK

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When he moved to Las Vegas 20 years ago, a gravel road provided access to his home. Not anymore. His house, less than 10 minutes from the famous Strip, is now located on a main boulevard. The city has grown incrementally and so too have the huge hotels and casinos that fuel the growth engine.

"Twenty years ago, no one could imagine growth like this," tells Lake. "Back then this was a small city. Today, this is a big city by any stan-

dard and the growth continues at breakneck speed."

The advent of modern "Vegas" with its 3,000-room hotels has created unique opportunities for anyone who wants to work, he explains. Employment abounds for hotel and casino support staff, for construction workers, for taxi drivers, and for just about anyone who is in the service business, including landscape contractors.

In business for nearly 20 years, Ocean Front has grown like the city. The first year in business, Lake gen-

erated \$1,400 a month in revenue. Today, he owns and operates a \$2 million-plus operation and he says he had so much work last year he turned down close to \$300,000 worth of new jobs. His primary customers are apartment complexes and condominiums. He provides full landscape maintenance services to at least 40 such properties which include mowing 170 acres of grass weekly.

CHALLENGING PICTURE

Before you get too excited and move to Vegas, consider this. The fescue that Lake's crews mow is more at home in any environment other than the desert. Irrigation is literally a way of life for this plant life and only a couple of days without water will put it into permanent dormancy.

The properties themselves are tightly configured. Adorned with shrubs, flowers and palm trees, as



Mike Lake admits he wouldn't be in business today without the Walkers. He says he wouldn't be able to compete because of the low-bidders.

"All these machines have done since I bought the first two is save me money."

well as grass, they provide a veritable obstacle course for mowing equipment. Not to mention the small berms that combine with any number of nooks and crannies to spice up the maintenance operation.

Then there is the employee situation. With all of the work in Las Vegas, finding and keeping employees may be the most challenging of all aspects for business owners like Lake.

There are other considerations, as well. Take traffic. The incredible

growth in resident population (between 1,200 and 1,400 new homes each month), plus the constant influx of visitors, make left-hand turns a near impossibility, says Lake. As he puts it, time is money in this business and savvy contractors can't have crews sitting at lights waiting for the green arrow. For his part, Lake personally routes each of three mowing crews to avoid time-killing left-hand turns.

Like most any market, Las Vegas has its share of price cutters, too. This unique patchwork of elements — man-made and natural — combines to make the Vegas market a challenging one, indeed.

"This is not a market for people who want to cut their teeth in landscaping," Lake emphasizes. "This is a tough environment and it takes experienced people to make a go of it."

MEETING THE CHALLENGES

Mike Lake's story is not unlike that of many others who one day find themselves stranded in Vegas without money. In Lake's case, however, he didn't lose his money gambling. No, the company he was working for went out of business and he was left with no job and little money. Familiar with the city, he knew he could find work if he just applied himself. He did, in an entrepreneurial sort of way. Lake started a small odd jobs company called Rent-a-Husband and supplemented his income dealing on a "craps" table. He later bought a small landscape company, and the rest is history.

In no time the small contracting business grew from \$1,400 a month to \$40,000. After that initial spurt, Ocean Front (a name taken from his previous address in California) leveled off at a 20 percent per annum growth rate. Today, in addition to

generating more than \$2 million in sales, the company employs 65 people, operates 20 vehicles and has a broad array of equipment that includes 13 Walker mowers.

Ocean Front has survived, even thrived, in the tough working conditions in Vegas, thanks to hard work

"This is not a market for people who want to cut their teeth in landscaping."

and sound business practices. On the management side, the company employs a unique blend of supervisors, on-site foremen and mowing crews that combine to provide timely service to customers.

Three supervisors, one each for the east, west and south sides of town, act as managers for Lake. Without them, it would be impossible to do the volume of work the company does, he adds.

The foremen and mowing crews share an important role, as well. The foremen are on individual properties year-round, performing routine maintenance tasks and, more importantly, making themselves available for emergency service, e.g., to fix a broken sprinkler head or spruce up a property for visitors. If the Ocean Front office receives a call from a property manager, it simply relays the call to the supervisor who delivers immediate service.

Mowing crews visit each property weekly from March through the end of November. During the winter, they back down to a bi-weekly schedule.

"I like to say our crews mow Las Vegas," tells Lake, adding the Walkers give his crews the ability

and agility to mow the tight spaces that comprise so many of the properties.

Lake purchased his first Walker in 1984 (a used chain drive unit). "I really couldn't afford it at the time," he explains. "But I was so amazed with its performance, I immediately bought another one." If he couldn't afford the first one, the second one really put him over the edge. And he adds succinctly, "All these machines have done since I bought the first two is save me money."

To be sure. He has since sold both original units for more than he paid for them. Not a bad return on investment. Still, the sales represent only a fraction of his real savings which, he explains, are measured in time saved on the jobs.

This owner is a self-confessed time fanatic. He knows to the minute how long it takes to drive to each property, to mow the property, to edge and trim, to check sprinkler systems and to blow a property. He doesn't do it for his health; he does it for the health of his business. The area is so competitive, he adds, there's always someone out there trying to underbid the job. If you can't mow and maintain a job competitively, you can't compete.

"I wouldn't be in business today without the Walkers. I wouldn't be able to compete against the 'low-bidders.'" By using the Walkers, Ocean Front crews kill the proverbial two birds with one stone. They get jobs done faster, a lot faster, and they save on mowing with push mowers, which reduces labor costs. The push mowers are still used for really tight spaces and island areas, but that's about it, tells Lake.

MAINTENANCE REGIMEN

To keep his Walkers running in top shape, Lake follows a strict preventive maintenance regimen. After

each workday, crews clean the air filters, clean around the engine and change the mower blades. At the end of each week they grease the mowers and change the oil. And twice yearly they upgrade belts and pulleys and give the engines a thorough going over. The schedule pays off. With a little care, says Lake, the mowers are "bullet proof."

The care is extremely important, he emphasizes, especially in the Las Vegas heat and dust. He points to lit-

tle dry patches that characterize turf that borders concrete and blacktop areas. "The heat is so intense, maybe around 150 degrees near the blacktop areas, the grass just can't stand it." Just think what the same extreme temperatures, when combined with dust and dirt, can do to engines.

Ocean Front runs all gas-powered Walkers. Mulching decks are used most of the growing season except in the spring when grass is the most succulent.

CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Change is a way of life in Las Vegas and contractors simply have to live with it. Lake has trained seven of his competitors and no doubt more are in training. Yet competition is a way of life in any market. More of a threat to his operation is the severe climate and unrelenting population growth that puts a strain on existing water supplies. Water prices are going up, way up, and already customers are looking for ways to reduce turf areas.

"I can say with a degree of certainty that this is the most grass you will ever see in Las Vegas," explains Lake. "The trend today is to put in more desert landscape and less grass."

"The heat is so intense, maybe around 150 degrees near the blacktop areas, the grass just can't stand it."

To accommodate the trend, Ocean Front has created a new division to remove sod and replace it with sand, rocks and native flora. That's a good news/bad news scenario. The move generates more short-term work, but it means a loss of work for mowing crews later on.

Yet the impact on Ocean Front crews and their Walkers won't be felt for years to come. In the meantime, there's plenty of mowing and mulching to be done. **WT**



Three supervisors, one each for the east, west and south sides of town, act as managers for Lake. Without them, it would be impossible to do the volume of work the company does.

Big dreams, big rewards in Florida

Brothers Dave and Peter Lucadano had a dream in 1985. They wanted to become the biggest and the best lawn maintenance company in the Tampa, Florida, area.

By any standard, that's a big dream considering the number of contractors on the west coast of Florida. By the Lucadanos' standards the dream was even bigger because, at that time, they were in high school and operated a push mower out of the family garage. If that didn't make the dream seem far-fetched, consider the fact the family had just moved to Florida from New Jersey.

The brothers had no ties to the area, little experience, yet they had a goal. "Dave was in 11th grade and Peter was a freshman," recalls family patriarch, Ernie, who himself was getting adjusted to the real estate business after years of being in trucking back East. "The boys had mowed lawns in New Jersey and they wanted to continue the work here, but with a more serious outlook," he notes.

Serious indeed! It's been 12 years since the move. Today, Luke Brothers, Inc., New Port Richey, Florida, is a \$3 million-plus operation. The company

Brothers Dave and Peter Lucadano with their father, Ernie. The brothers wanted to become the biggest and the best lawn maintenance company in the Tampa, Florida, area. Today, Luke Brothers employs 105 people, operates 45 mowers, including 15 Walkers, and has a total of 150 commercial customers spread over a four-county area.

employs 105 people year-round, operates 45 mowers, including 15 Walkers, and has a total of 150 commercial customers spread over a four-county area around Tampa.

GROWING PAINS

To grow their fledgling operation, the brothers employed more than a little creativity. After school, they canvassed the neighborhood and dropped off flyers. In between, at their father's request, they worked at a Chinese



Ernie refers to 8 mowers equipped with 21-hp Kubota gas engines as "Super Walkers."

A small pickup has been transformed into a traveling workshop.

restaurant as busboys. Work came slowly. Their first two accounts were their father's and grandfather's properties, followed by neighbors who saw the work they were doing.

"We experimented with a lot of marketing strategies over the years," recalls Peter. "It always comes back to word of mouth. You couldn't beat it then and it still is our most effective marketing tool."

The small company grew. One of the first dramatic changes came in equipment. Florida grass was just too tough for the little 3 1/2-hp push mowers imported from New Jersey. They moved quickly into larger horsepower units, then to midsize walk-behinds.

Customers evolved, too. During the early years, Luke Brothers concentrated exclusively in the residential market, at the peak mowing between 40 and 50

properties a day. As father and sons point out, however, the residential market was tough, especially in Florida where competition seemed to be more intense than in New Jersey.

"Almost from the beginning, Dave wanted to get into the commercial

"It always comes back to word of mouth. You couldn't beat it then and it still is our most effective marketing tool."

market," relates Peter. "He would pay close attention to those properties, watch the mowing crews and really strive to learn as much as he could about the market."

The company's first commercial

account was a strip mall; the second, a urology center that laid them off in the winter. "Being laid off was good for us," remembers Dave. "That taught us a lesson. From then on, we attempted to sign up both commercial and residential customers to year-long contracts, charging them a straight monthly fee. The move ensured us we would have

money coming in year-round." And, he adds, in Florida, the only time a company can really make money is in the winter when the growing season slows.

Their big breakthrough occurred when they landed some AAA accounts, giving the company more exposure. A condo complex next to one of the motor clubs signed on and Luke Brothers was off to the races.

FIRST WALKER

Six years after moving to Florida, Luke Brothers purchased its first Walker. "We were watching a competitor with a Walker and he was doing twice as much as our crews could do, with less manpower," tells Peter. "So we bought one of those little yellow machines and immediately tripled our residential business."

The brothers quickly introduced the mower to commercial accounts. "If a condominium or apartment complex specified a 21-inch mower, we would bid on the account and convince the property managers we could do it better with a Walker," remembers Peter. "We asked them to give us two months with the Walker, and if they weren't satisfied, we would use a push mower. We never used a push mower."

Customers quickly found out the Walkers didn't tear up the grass like other riders, Peter adds. And it delivered a consistently even and clean cut.

As Ernie points out, there are plenty of berms and swales on the properties and plenty of opportunity for decks to scalp. The Walker didn't scalp.

The mower had other advantages, too; some subtle, some not so subtle.

"Big mowers created a perception problem with some of our accounts," relates Ernie. "They're loud and they're threatening. The Walker was anything but threatening." But the mower's real advantage, he notes, is their combination of power and size. They are quick and productive, cutting down on line trimming and the use of push mowers, and their small size cuts down on damage, especially in some of the mobile home parks.

One Walker led to another. Up to three years ago, all of them had grass handling systems. A methane gas problem at area composting facilities put a curb on clippings and the company made a switch to mulching decks. Now, all properties are mulched.

"The Walkers mulch the grass into almost nothing," says Peter, "to the extent people say they can't even find the clippings."

To do the best mulching job possible in the tough Florida conditions, Ernie says the company employs eight "Super Walkers" with 42-inch decks. He uses "super" to describe those powered by 21-hp Kubota gas engines. In combination with direct drive decks, the liquid-cooled power makes short shrift of tough St. Augustine grass.

"I'm not saying it just to be polite, but the Walkers have been a great part of our success," he emphasizes.

FUNDAMENTAL REASONING

The Lucadano family came to Florida with little mowing experience. Yet within a few years, they had built a business of which they could be proud. In fact, by 1992, there was so much work, Ernie gave up his shirt-and-tie real estate job to work full time with his sons. How did they succeed?

"We did the basics," explains Peter. "We knew the importance of honesty and we knew how to work. The best

allowance our father gave us when we were growing up was no allowance at all."

They also understood the value of hiring hard-working employees. From the very beginning, they treated employees like family and earned their respect by being genuinely concerned about what was happening on their home front. The company also

"I'm not saying this to be polite, but the Walkers have been a great part of our success."

employs an "open door" policy, provides benefits and overall aspires to treat everyone equally.

Luke Brothers also puts profits back into the business. That's evident by their equipment. Trucks and trailers are spotless, and maintenance equipment is all well maintained. The upkeep is just one of Ernie's responsibilities. He spends all Saturday going over the equipment ensuring it's ready for Monday morning startup.

Routine maintenance is a must, as well. The Walkers run 10 to 12 hours a day, five days a week. To keep them impervious to the unrelenting heat and sand, the mowers receive frequent oil and filter changes and blades are

changed every four hours. Crews go through about 150 sharp blades a day.

Following good maintenance practices saves money, Ernie points out. Their first Walker is still operating and both the brothers and father say they have no plans to sell any of them. Routine maintenance will keep their Walkers going strong.

The company looks to save money in other areas, too. Instead of buying fuel at retail, they have it delivered on site. The move saves approximately 10 cents a gallon on gas, not to mention countless hours fueling at stations. They've also designed their own truck beds and have transformed small pickups into traveling workshops to hold equipment, tools and repair parts, fuel and air.

In the end, it all comes back to the fundamentals: people, equipment and how the company takes care of both. Luke Brothers is riding high in both concerns. Not only is it one of the biggest landscape contractors in the area, but it has to be among the best, too. **WT**



Luke Brothers bought its first Walker six years after moving to Florida. The mowers helped the company triple its residential business, but they quickly introduced it to commercial accounts, as well.



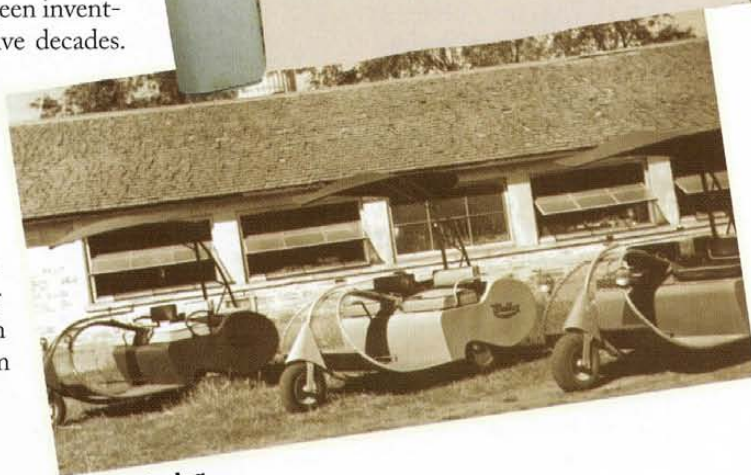
Max and Margaret Walker.

A short history of Walker Manufacturing

In the long run, it's the journey that counts

Walker Manufacturing founder Max Walker has been inventing and designing equipment for more than five decades. He built his first lawn mower, a sickle bar unit, in 1949, and the first Walker was introduced in the late 1970s. Today, the company that literally introduced the compact commercial transmission steer mower to the market turns out more than 20 riders a day from its new factory in Fort Collins, Colorado.

In Max Walker's own words, his life has been an adventure. But more than that the story of Walker Manufacturing is the story of a man, in partnership with wife, Margaret, who had a dream and realized that dream through hard work and an undying faith in God.



The beginning.

Q: *Max, your company has been designing and manufacturing mowers for 16 years in Fort Collins, Colorado. But where does the Walker story really begin?*

A: I was born and raised on a cattle farm in Fowler, Kansas. Our business was raising Polled Herefords and selling the bulls to ranchers. Like most farmers, we had to improvise to make things work and I especially enjoyed working on and modifying equipment. After marrying Margaret and starting a family, we began to dream about leaving the farm and starting our own manufacturing business. A friend encouraged me to develop a new golf car, one that was powered by a gasoline engine instead of batteries. Back then, batteries didn't have the capacity they have today and cars would run out of power before the golfer could get through the course.

Q: *Did you actually design and build golf cars?*

A: Yes. I built our first golf car in the late 1950s. We didn't have any capital to speak of and, in terms of equipment, all we had was an electric welder, cutting torch, hack saw and a Mulberry Tree.

Q: *A Mulberry Tree?*

A: I used a fork in the tree to bend the pipe frame. It was crude, but it worked. Everything on that car was hand-made. In the first year, I built about a dozen cars and sold them by running a couple of ads in golf course magazines. Margaret and I operated the company. I did the product development and manufacturing; Margaret learned bookkeeping and handled the books and responded to leads.

Q: *Was that first business a success?*

A: Well yes it was. It was tough finding the necessary capital, but we managed. We even grew the business to include the development and manufacture of a utility truck (we called it the Walker Power Truck), a floor scrubber and a large deck scrubber for the Navy. I even had the opportunity to visit an aircraft carrier and demonstrate our scrubber.

Q: *What ever happened to that first business?*

A: We built variations of the four products for six years, but eventually sold out to a group of Casper, Wyoming, businessmen who then retained me to do product development for their company. So we left Kansas for Wyoming. The year was 1968.

Q: *The move to Wyoming was only 10 years before the development of the first Walker Mower. How did you get from golf cars to mowers in 10 years?*

A: A lot can happen in 10 years. The Wyoming company failed and we lost everything, to the extent our phone service was even shut off. I know what it's like to be without money. But we didn't stop working. I developed a patent for an evaporative cooling system and, using the cash from selling the patent, I was able to buy back most of the tools we had given up in Wyoming. We moved to Loveland, Colorado, and started making coolers. Marketing wasn't one of my strong points, however, and the coolers were manufactured under contract to a marketing company in Greeley, Colorado. Unfortunately, as is usually the case, once a company loses control of the marketing, it loses control of production, as well. The com-

pany that marketed our coolers wanted to buy us out. When we said we weren't for sale, they pulled the production of the coolers.

Q: *How did you get into the mower business?*

A: While we were manufacturing coolers, and we built a lot of them, somewhere between 70,000 and 80,000 units, we started to investigate the mower market. In 1977, our family had purchased a new riding mower in Loveland, and we were disappointed in the way it operated. It couldn't maneuver around the trees in our yard, and the grass catching system seemed all too cumbersome. So being machine designers, we designed a mower that met our needs. By now, my two sons Bob and Dean were interested in the business and helped in the design process.

Q: *But having little or no mower manufacturing experience, how could you develop a new mower?*

A: Well we knew what we wanted. We wanted a mower with a zero-turning radius, we wanted a mower with an internal and not external catching system, and we wanted something very compact. We also needed to have a center discharge mowing deck to accommodate the catching system. With that in mind we built our first prototype. Coming from a farming background, we also appreciated the value of having a machine that was serviceable, so from the beginning we designed a mower that could be easily serviced. In fact, our first golf cars had a body that was raised for easy engine and drive train accessibility.

Q: *When did you sell your first Walker Mower?*

A: Oh, I don't remember the exact date, but in 1980 we built 25 mowers. In those early years, before actually going into full-scale production, we would run a little ad in trade publications and my son, Bob, would take the leads and prepare an itinerary for me and my wife, Margaret. Bob would arrange the trip and we would load a couple of mowers on a trailer and drive around the country giving demonstrations. On one of those trips, to Florida, a lawn maintenance contractor bought the two mowers on the trailer and the trailer itself, and placed an order for 48 more mowers. That was really how we got started. Margaret and I drove back to Colorado, without the trailer and mowers but with a large order. That year, we decided to build 125 mowers, and we've been building mowers ever since.

Q: Max, to what do you attribute your success?

A: In the early years, our success was dependent on lots of hard work and really coming up with a mower like no other on the market. The machine has a well-defined niche and it has been well received. Later on, as we grew, the credit for our success has to be shared by my sons. Dean is really the architect of the mowers and attachments, and Bob is largely responsible for setting up distribution and marketing the product. We believe in God, too, and feel we have been blessed. To think you can literally start from nothing and develop a business like this makes you believe in miracles.

Q: As you think back on those early years, what were some lessons that really paid off?

A: I think the main lesson we've learned revolves around the word "control." We learned early on the only way to dictate our own destiny was to be in control. That's one more reason why today we build as much of the Walker Mower as we can right in-house. I also realized that if this business were to grow and be a success, I would have to give over control to my sons who would take it to the next level. They have done that, and that one decision has been pivotal to our success, as well.

Q: In terms of quality, the Walker Mower speaks for itself. Yet, there is something behind the scenes that ensures this high level of quality is an ongoing occurrence. What exactly is that something?

A: That's a tough question. But I think it all goes back to the family concept. We tell the people who work here they're part of the family; so are our distributors and dealers and our end-user customers. In fact, we tell our employees they don't work for us, but work with us to produce a product for which we can all be proud. Our mower's value is neither defined by the metal in its construction nor the quality of its cut. It is truly defined by the role it plays in helping other people make a living. We really believe that. If the Walker Mower can be a fundamental part of someone's livelihood, then we have done something right. **WT**

Is financing a mower for you?

What to consider when making a borrowing decision



When you visit a prospective customer, what type of sales approach do you use?

If you're like most successful lawn maintenance professionals, you will talk about your experience in the industry, the quality of your work, your employees, response time and, just maybe, before the presentation ends, you might bring up price.

Yet when you walk into a dealer's showroom, what's the first thing on your mind? Price. The reason is that all successful business people work within a budget. Unfortunately, there oftentimes is a direct relationship between price and what a machine can or can't do for you. In other words, the lowest price may not be the best deal.

Of course, that's easy to say if you're not the one laying out the bread. But in any business, the initial price of a purchase counts less, much less, than the actual value of that purchase. In the lawn maintenance business, the value of a mower is measured in terms of productivity, operator comfort, quality of cut, durability, warranty and serviceability.

The catch? The buyer has to be able to afford the value. That's where financing can help.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Financing a piece of equipment isn't for everyone. Some operators don't want to pay the interest. Others feel if they can't afford the piece of equipment up front, it's not for them. But the reality of doing business today, of being able to grow and remain competitive, of having sufficient cash flow, has made prudent borrowing a viable option, if not an absolute necessity. The emphasis is on the word "prudent."

Before borrowing money or otherwise financing a purchase, take a few moments to crunch the numbers. Determine what your cash flow will be with the new purchase. Determine how much time you will save with the new mower and how

much that labor savings translates into revenue.

Then determine what the mower will cost on a monthly basis, including interest and principle. If the revenue to be brought in by the new mower exceeds the monthly payment, plus operator labor and maintenance costs, then the mower will generate a positive cash flow.

In most cases, if a mower can generate a positive cash flow, that's a good reason to consider a financing option. There are other reasons, too, which are less tangible but equally important to your operation, e.g., serviceability, durability, reliability and quality of cut. But the primary reason to finance any piece of lawn maintenance equipment is to be able to get the unit in the field quickly so it can begin making money for the operator.

BORROWER PROFILE

Retail finance companies, local banks and other lending institutions follow a set of guidelines to determine whether or not a customer is a good candidate for a loan. Credit history, income, profit and loss statements may all be part of these guidelines. So, too, are variables like stability (how long you've lived at your current residence and job history). All can come into play when applying for a loan. For big purchases over \$20,000, some lending institutions might require a look at your contracts to make sure you can generate the income to pay back the loan. In other cases, simply taking 10 or 15 minutes to fill out an application form and waiting 10 minutes for the institution to reply may be all it takes to gain approval.

The truth is, financing is big business today and it is competitive. Getting money to make a purchase is a lot easier than you might think. And there are programs to satisfy nearly any contingency, from no money down and no interest for a predetermined period of time (to accommodate the mowing season),

to more creative programs that allow customers to skip payments when the season slows or when emergencies occur.


The bottom line, of course, is the lending company wants to be paid according to the agreement, just like you want to be paid for your work.

Which brings up one last point. If financing is an option you're seriously considering, it makes sense to go one step beyond the monthly cash flow exercise. The reason? Payments extend for several months. Signing up customers to yearly contracts whenever possible will put your business on more solid footing and help provide a degree of financial stability to ensure loan payback is uninterrupted.

Remember the old saying, "Price becomes an issue only in the absence of value?" The next time you walk

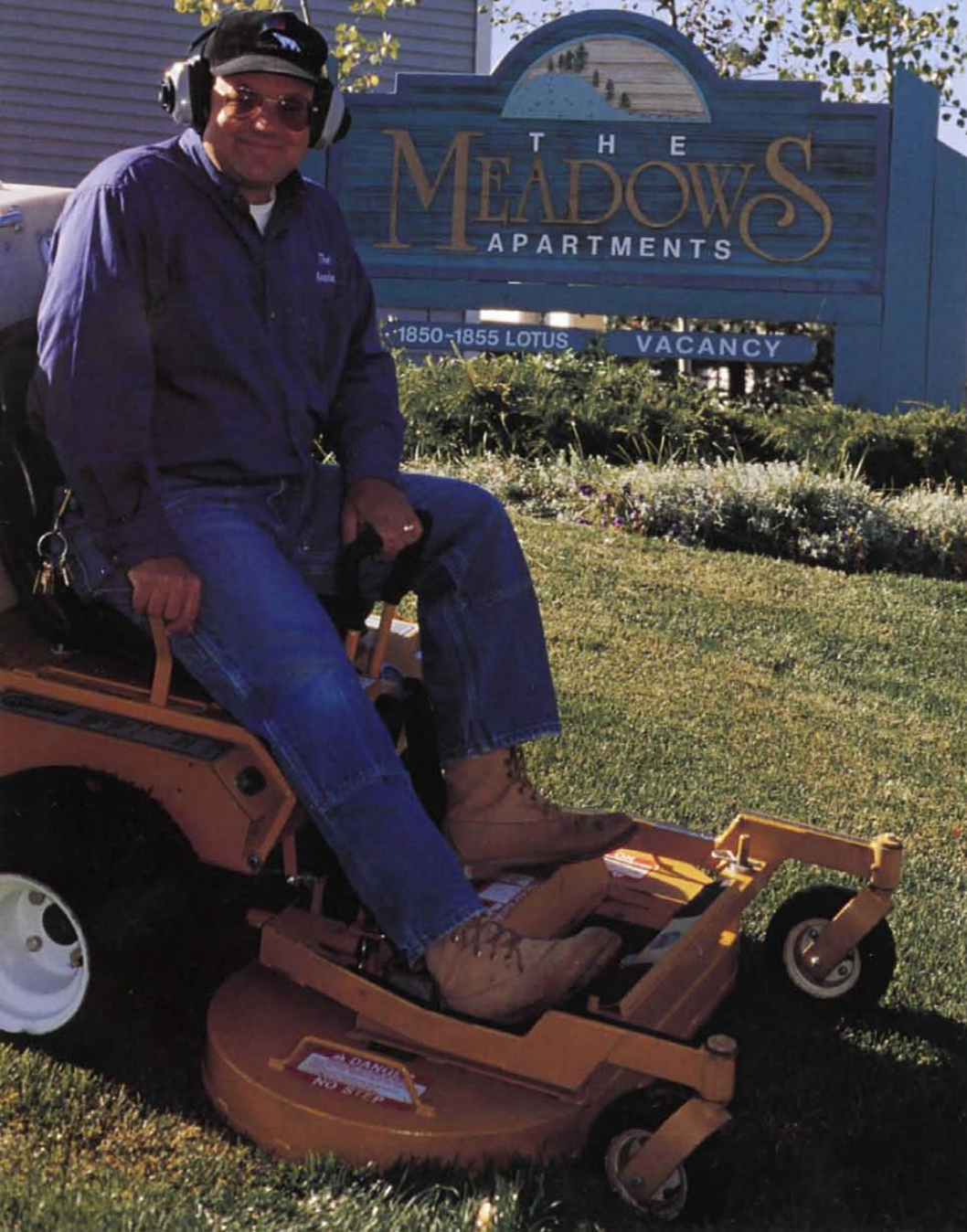
Price is an issue only in the absence of value.

into a dealer's showroom, determine what the mower can do for you before focusing in on price — the same way you explain to customers how your service can be of value to them before talking about how much it will cost. If the mower can produce twice the amount of work your present mower is producing, or give you a better cut, or is more durable and reliable, then it may very well be worth the higher price and the financing costs.

Note: Your local bank will oftentimes offer the most favorable terms for borrowing money. However, there are national finance companies that specialize in lending money to lawn maintenance professionals. One of these companies, Dealer's Credit, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, has been especially helpful in getting Walker users from the showroom floor to the yard. 

Mowing and management come together in

Oregon



When Dan Fogerty asked the owners of a Bend, Oregon, apartment complex to bring lawn maintenance in-house, he had no idea they would accept the idea. After all, the owners had always contracted out the maintenance and Dan had little experience mowing lawns and landscaping. In his proposal, he would take over exterior maintenance that included upkeep of 200,000 square feet of turf and a variety of trees, shrubs and flowers.

A bold idea? And how! That was a year and a half ago, and Dan and his wife, Alison, were just starting their fourth property management job. They had relocated from Portland to Bend, to manage the 170-unit Meadows Apartments. Dan saw an opportunity and so did the owners. The agreement was made. All Dan had to do was put together a maintenance package, keep costs including the purchase and maintenance of equipment below what the contractors were charging, and do a better job. In his words, he had his "work cut out" for him.

FAST START

Having no previous experience in

Dan Fogerty's maintenance agreement at The Meadows Apartments includes the upkeep of 200,000 square feet of turf.

maintenance, Dan “lucked out” by visiting a dealer who understood his mowing application. The dealer suggested a Walker mower because it would give him the maneuverability he would need for mowing the complex. Knowing little about mowers, Dan listened attentively and then checked out every possible alternative. He tried bigger riders, faster riders, even midsize walk-behind mowers.

“In the agreement with the owners, I really had only one day a week, plus some extra time on weekends, to work on the landscape. The mower had to be efficient.” As for the other riders he tried out, Dan said they were either too big or too clumsy.

He settled for a 16-hp, GHS Walker, with a 42-inch deck. According to Dan, he liked the machine’s solid construction, ease of maintenance (Dan said he wanted to do most of the routine service on the machine) and maneuverability. The package included a push mower for trimming, a chain saw, line trimmer, edger, backpack blower, 6 x 10 trailer and a storage shed. The total cost came to approximately \$10,000, well within the prescribed budget.

Dan raised the shed and he was in the maintenance business, at least one day a week. The rest of the time was spent doing interior maintenance: painting, fixing appliances, cleaning, rebuilding hot water heaters, just about anything one can think of to keep the place running smoothly. Since The Meadows was only about five years old, it didn’t require a lot of upkeep. While Dan was doing the maintenance, Alison was in the front office renting the units and managing the facility overall.

CUTTING CORNERS

Dan shaved time, if not money, immediately from his maintenance budget when he found he didn’t need the push mower for trimming. He traded the mower for a Walker dethatcher attachment. But there was still a learning curve to overcome.

“When I first started using the Walker, it took about one and one-half days to complete the mowing. That was too much time,” Dan emphasizes. So he adjusted the landscape or, as he puts it, “optimized the mower’s performance by optimizing the terrain.”

The first thing to go was square corners. Sure, the mower could



Dan’s dealer recognized the mowing application as one ideally suited for a Walker.

To save time mowing, Dan transformed corners into straight lines and curves.

handle the configurations, Dan relates, but it naturally took more time to finish off a square than to glide around a curve.

“I removed every square corner I could find, from the beds that lined the apartment foundations to the tree wells,” he tells.

As for the trees that line the walks, he simply transformed the square wells into half moons that allow him to easily mow around them without backing up. There is no stopping or slowing. In his words, he just “roars right on by.”



The reconfiguration of the landscape not only speeded up the mowing process, Dan says it also improved the property's overall appearance.

"When you look at nature, you don't see any squares," Dan relates. "Everything is graceful and flowing. I just injected a little natural beauty into the property." And he shaved several hours off the mowing as well, to the extent it would take him only six or seven hours — less than one day to finish the job. In addition to mowing, he "line" trims twice a month, routinely adds bark and mulch, dethatches and aerates. He also does landscape installation, but not entirely alone. His maintenance assistant helps out on "maintenance" day.

In the agreement struck with the apartment owners, Dan receives a monthly bonus during the growing season for doing the exterior maintenance. Since he is allocated only one day a week for maintenance, time is precious. As he puts it, "Without the Walker, I couldn't have put the deal together."

SMARTER . . . NOT HARDER

Experience gained over several years of managing properties has taught Dan and Alison lessons about how to improve efficiencies.

The management team, for example, employs golf carts for easy and quick transportation. They move Dan and his assistant from apartment to apartment. And Alison uses them to show prospective customers the grounds. Two-way radios speed up the communication process while little wooden ramps strategically placed around the property facilitate cart and Walker mower movement



from roadside to sidewalk. "The ramps save a lot of back-tracking," Dan explains.

It's not surprising then that Dan built some interesting efficiencies in his new lawn maintenance routine, as well. He performs routine service like his maintenance contractor counterparts, including being fastid-

"Without the Walker I couldn't have put the deal together."

ious about changing oil and filters. But during the dethatching season, he uses a K & N off-road racing air filter that he says essentially allows him to go longer between filter changes. And he understands the importance of keeping blades sharp. But thanks to advice from a factory worker friend who had a career sharpening blades, he no longer sharpens mower blades to a razor thin edge before installing them. He dulls them slightly first to make the



When winter comes, Dan's Walker converts quickly and easily for snow removal from the complex's parking lots and sidewalks.

This is the Fogertys' fourth apartment complex to manage. Alison does the selling and bookwork while Dan does the upkeep.

edge last longer.

On the operations side, spending hours digging up sod to form tree wells is past history, too. An application of herbicide — carefully scribed around the tree or other landscape element — will do the same thing, he says, and it doesn't take nearly as long. The grass will die in a few weeks, at which time he will loosen the turf with a dethatcher and apply a layer of mulch or bark.

There is a common thread throughout Dan's landscape management approach. Find a more efficient way to get the job done and, at the same time, improve the appearance of the property.

The proverbial dust has settled now. This will be the Fogertys' second summer in Bend. A survey of apartment residents confirms what the couple had hoped. The property's appearance is receiving high marks and, overall, drawing a lot of attention.

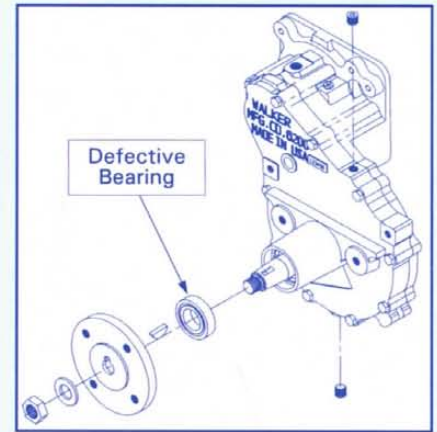
It goes to show, mowing and management can go hand-in-hand. But it takes the right people, the right approach and the right equipment.



RECALL ON GEAR AXLE

A group of '94 models has the possibility of axle bearing failure due to the wrong type of grease inadvertently used by the bearing manufacturer. Bulletin #9689 calls for the inspection of S/N 94-18075 thru 94-20075 and replacement of all defective bearings.

All owners within the affected serial number range are encouraged to have their units checked and repaired free of charge by contacting their local Walker Dealer. (Contact the factory if there is difficulty in making contact with your dealer.)



NEW ENGINE FOR MODEL MD

For '97, a 20.9-hp diesel/24.5-hp gasoline Kubota engine is installed in Walker Mower Model MD. This engine offers more power and reduced exhaust emissions, meeting EPA guidelines, in comparison to the earlier version. The new engine installation also features a high

capacity radiator, 40-amp alternator and large 4.3-gallon fuel tank. The radiator is cooled by an electric fan which offers self-cleaning action of the radiator screen by an automatic reversing cycle (patent pending). Delivery of the new model is scheduled to begin January '97.



STEVENS EDGER ATTACHMENT FOR WALKER MOWER

The Stevens Coulter Blade Edger Attachment has been developed as an attachment and quickly trims grass along the concrete edge of sidewalks, curbs and walking paths. There are big labor savings, less mess and no flying debris in comparison to the rotary blade type

edger. Simple mechanical blade engagement (eliminating expensive hydraulics), a quick-mount bracket on the tractor, self-sharpening blade, and single hitch pin height adjustment make this an easy-to-use attachment capable of edging 3 to 4 miles per hour.

WALKER MANUFACTURING VISITS SOUTH AMERICA

In October, Tim Cromley of Walker Manufacturing visited Distribuidora y Comercial Estra S.A., Walker's new distributor in Chile. Tim also visited Montevideo, Uruguay and Buenos Aires,

Argentina. As a result, a new distributor, Grupo Serva, has been established for Uruguay and Paraguay, and a distributorship in Argentina is being negotiated.



FACTORY BOOSTS CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY IN '96

The Walker factory has operated with the approach of fabricating as much of the finished product as possible (contrary to the popular practice of outsourcing by many manufactur-

ers). Following this "in-house" philosophy, the factory fabrication capability was boosted during '96 by purchasing a CAD/CAM laser cutting system for cutting sheet metal parts, a CNC

turning center for machining parts and an automatic horizontal saw. Also, welding capacity was increased by adding 10 welding stations.

Mowing Mania!

Daytona Beach retirement community mows 164-plus acres in four days

The routine is the same every Monday morning. Mark Fagnant and Leroy Collins line up their two Walker mowers. Then they peer down a one mile stretch that cuts through the center of Colonial Colony South. To the right and left of this road are more than 570 retirement homes, comprised of single and double-wide manufactured homes. Each has a distinctive landscape and a sizable patch of St. Augustine grass. Fagnant's and Collins' job is to mow each lawn in this community, then traverse a couple of miles down the road to Colony in the Wood to tackle another 380 plus homes before the mowing week ends.

When the job is completed on Thursday evening, the mowing crew will have tallied up approximately 40 hours on each Walker and mowed more than 900 yards.

"This is a lot of mowing," tells Roger Shulzinsky, who supervises the mowing crews and oversees both communities and a third one, all in Daytona Beach and all owned by the Shaddix family. "Before we purchased our first Walker two years ago, it would take four men two days to mow just one of the communities," he emphasizes.

When you're talking this volume of grass, speed and productivity are important. But so is the quality of cut and other tangibles such as being able to mow in wet conditions, having the capability to mow without "sinking" into the turf, and mowing without downtime. According to Shulzinsky and his mowing crews, with the Walkers, Colonial Colony has the best of all worlds.

EVOLUTIONARY PATH

Mowing wasn't always this easy at the retirement village. Nor was the Walker mower the company's first choice. In fact, when Colonial Colony tried its first Walker out in the early 80s, the mower was passed over for what was thought to be a lack of capacity for the big job at hand. Instead, mowing crews went with a collection of intermediate sized walk mowers and out-front cutters. It wasn't until two years ago, when Port Orange Mower demonstrated a Walker, that the mower was reconsidered.

"Mark is really the one who said we needed the Walker," tells Shulzinsky. "After taking it for a spin he said, 'this is just what we've been looking for.'" Fagnant got his way and the company bought its first Walker, which now has 2,000 trouble-free hours on it. The unit was followed up by a second, now with better than 1300 hours, and a third one last year. Each is equipped with a 54-

inch side discharge deck (there is too much grass to catch). They get lubricated every day, blades are changed twice a week and oil and filter are changed weekly.

Far left: Supervisor Roger Shulzinsky.

Left: Mark Fagnant (foreground) and Leroy Collins mow 900+ yards weekly.



There's a bonus about operating the Walkers, notes Shulzinsky: "Our maintenance costs are down to almost nothing."

The Walkers have allowed mowing crews to set some incredible mowing records. Fagnant, whom Shulzinsky says fashions himself a mowing expert, recently became the first person to single handedly mow Colonial Colony South. If that doesn't seem like much, consider the fact there are five miles of roads in the community and enough "ins and outs" to severely put to test the skills of even the most proficient operators. Mark just shrugs his shoulders and says "it was nothing."

Mowing partner Leroy Collins followed up by doing the same at Colony in the Wood. Today, the crew works in tandem mowing both communities. They alternate sides weekly to ensure landscapes receive a little different cut

"Our maintenance costs are down to almost nothing."

each time. They top off their week by mowing a nearby church property which is an additional 2 1/2 acres.

Colonial Colony South and Colony in the Wood are mowed somewhere between 37 and 42 times a year, depending on the weather. Lawns are mowed higher in the summer so grass plants can shade themselves from the intense Florida sun. As the winter mowing season approaches, the decks are lowered one notch at a time, first the front, then the rear of the deck — and again, until the cut shaves off an additional 1 1/2 inches. "You have to lower the deck in stages," explains Shulzinsky, "because of the sheer volume of grass." The process is reversed to accommodate the summer growing season.

"The Walkers seem like they are designed for the tough conditions in the village," tells Shulzinsky, an employee of Colonial Colony since the mid 60's. It's their compact size and maneuverability that really sets them apart from the competition, he adds, citing an incident last year when a dealer came by with a different brand mower. "He never even unloaded the unit."

UNIQUE VILLAGE

To be sure, Walker mowers and Colonial Colony seem made for one another. Both are special, says Shulzinsky.

The communities represent a cross section of the population. As Shulzinsky tells, there are people from all "walks of life," including a one-time Mr. Universe and the oldest living Shriner. The latter, Albert, is 108 years old, still drives and has yet to have an accident after 90 years of being behind the wheel. Whew!

A monthly fee at each community covers all community services: city water and sewer, deep well irrigation water for lawns, mowing, fertilizing, and spraying for chinch bugs on all lawns. Also included are garbage and trash removal, basic and extended television service, courtesy bus and use of the recreational facilities.

Most of the services fall within Shulzinsky's domain. For fertilizing, he toggles up a pull-behind spreader to a Walker mower. The set-up, which is highlighted by a cable that allows the operator to turn the spreader on and off from the Walker seat, applies 15 tons of fertilizer twice a year. He also orchestrates the garbage pickup and is quick to help residents locate outside contractors for services that

don't fall within the community's jurisdiction, e.g., inside plumbing and painting homes.

Virtually everything else is taken care of. Income for the facilities is derived primarily from the monthly "rental" fees and care is taken to keep costs in line so fees don't outstrip the fixed income of residents.

That's one reason why the Walker mowers fit so well, explains Shulzinsky. "The other mowers had so much downtime, it kept one of our key employees busy almost daily repairing them." Remove the lost time associated with downtime, remove the expense of the same, and subtract the number of man-hours saved by using only two mowers and employees



Mowing connoisseur Mark Fagnant demonstrates trimming technique at Colony in the Wood.

instead of four year-round and cost-savings add up...to the extent Colonial Colony plans to buy another Walker next year and reassign its oldest one to Colony North. The odd mower out will still be used as a backup, to cover on those rare occasions when the heat and rain combine to outstrip mowing capacity.

In the meantime, look for more mowing records to be set this year. **WT**

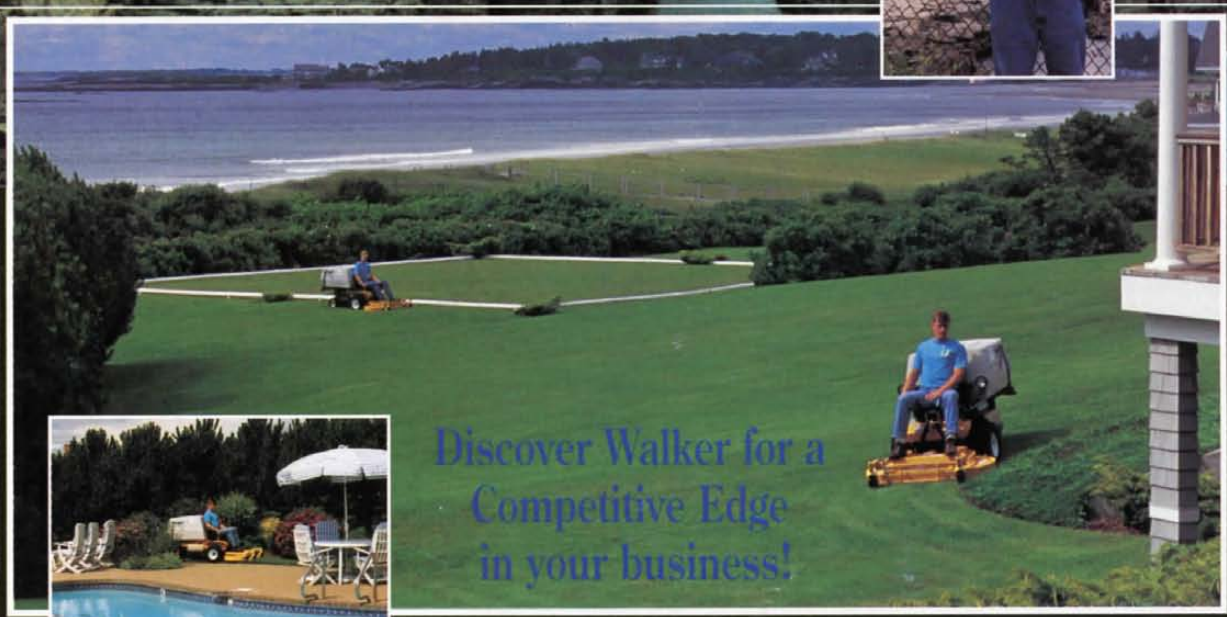
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Walker Keeps Maine Contractor in the Mowing Business GET THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

Steve Bennett, Scarborough, Maine, has been in the landscape contracting business since 1971. He nearly quit the business in the early 90s when he became increasingly frustrated by losing jobs to competition, lowering prices, and marginal profit levels. He needed a competitive edge. Then, in the spring of 1994, he purchased a Walker Mower and wrote to tell us what happened:

"By the end of the season, my son and I found that we had reduced our mowing times by as much as 50%...Walker Mowers allowed us to expand our weekly mowing 38% from the previous year without having to have extra personnel."



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